

Message Text

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ACTION EUR-25

INFO OCT-01 AF-10 ISO-00 SCI-06 AEC-11 AID-20 CIAE-00

COME-00 EB-11 FRB-02 INR-10 NSAE-00 RSC-01 TRSE-00

XMB-07 OPIC-12 SP-03 CIEP-02 LAB-06 SIL-01 OMB-01 L-03

SS-20 NSC-07 DRC-01 /160 W
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FM AMEMBASSY PARIS

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C O N F I D E N T I A L PARIS 11408

E.O. 11652: GDS

TAGS: ENRG, EMIN, FR, GB

SUBJECT: FRENCH URANIUM NEGOTIATIONS IN GABON

1. REPRESENTATIVE OF US URANIUM FIRM (UTAH INTERNATIONAL) HAS TOLD US THAT AUTHORITIES OF COMMISSARIAT A L'ENERGIE ATOMIQUE (CEA) HAVE RECENTLY REFUSED TO APPROVE HIS PREVIOUSLY SCHEDULED VISIT TO COMPAGNIE FRANCEVILLE MINERAIS D'URANIUM FACILITIES IN GABON. REASON GIVEN IS "DELICATE STATE OF CURRENT NEGOTIATIONS." CEA ALSO INDICATED TO HIM THAT THEY WERE DENYING CURRENT REQUEST OF US GEOLOGIC SURVEY TEAM TO VISIT GABON MINES. WHEN QUERIED, HOWEVER, NEITHER CEA NOR FONOFF COULD CONFIRM TO US THE EXISTENCE OF ANY SUCH POLICY. CEA OFFICIAL COMMENTED UNOFFICIALLY THAT POLICY ON VISITS IS OFTEN SET BY INDIVIDUAL URANIUM COMPANIES. FONOFF NUCLEAR OFFICIAL SAID THAT NEGOTIATIONS BETWEEN FRENCH AND GABONESE WERE SUSPENDED (NOT INTERRUPTED) OWING TO ON-GOING PRESIDENTIAL ELECTIONS AND WOULD BE EVENTUALLY RESUMED. HE WAS, HOWEVER, UNAWARE OF ANY NEW OFFICIAL RESTRICTION ON VISITING FRENCH MINING FACILITIES IN GABON.

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COMMENT: IN VIEW OF FRENCH DECISION TO ACCELERATE NUCLEAR POWER DEVELOPMENT PROGRAM TO MAXIMUM, FRENCH CONSIDER FIRM URANIUM SUPPLY ARRANGEMENTS VITAL TO THEIR EFFORT TO GAIN GREATER ENERGY INDEPENDENCE. HENCE, THEIR SENSITIVITIES AND RETICENCE ARE UNDERSTANDABLE, PARTICULARLY GIVEN CURRENT GABONESE EFFORTS TO INCREASE URANIUM ORE PRICES SHARPLY WITH ATTENDANT THREAT TO DIVERSIFY BUYERS, AND GIVEN ALSO RECENT MILITARY COUP IN NIGER AND LIKELIHOOD NEW REGIME WILL BE AT LEAST AS EAGER AS PREDECESSOR TO INCREASE URANIUM PRICE. END COMMENT.

IRWIN

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Message Attributes

Automatic Decaptioning: X
Capture Date: 01 JAN 1994
Channel Indicators: n/a
Current Classification: UNCLASSIFIED
Concepts: URANIUM, BUSINESSMEN, POLICIES, FOREIGN RELATIONS, NEGOTIATIONS, VISITS
Control Number: n/a
Copy: SINGLE
Draft Date: 10 MAY 1974
Decaption Date: 01 JAN 1960
Decaption Note:
Disposition Action: RELEASED
Disposition Approved on Date:
Disposition Authority: GarlanWA
Disposition Case Number: n/a
Disposition Comment: 25 YEAR REVIEW
Disposition Date: 28 MAY 2004
Disposition Event:
Disposition History: n/a
Disposition Reason:
Disposition Remarks:
Document Number: 1974PARIS11408
Document Source: CORE
Document Unique ID: 00
Drafter: n/a
Enclosure: n/a
Executive Order: GS
Errors: N/A
Film Number: D740115-0377
From: PARIS
Handling Restrictions: n/a
Image Path:
ISecure: 1
Legacy Key: link1974/newtext/t19740557/aaaabyyd.tel
Line Count: 73
Locator: TEXT ON-LINE, ON MICROFILM
Office: ACTION EUR
Original Classification: CONFIDENTIAL
Original Handling Restrictions: n/a
Original Previous Classification: n/a
Original Previous Handling Restrictions: n/a
Page Count: 2
Previous Channel Indicators:
Previous Classification: CONFIDENTIAL
Previous Handling Restrictions: n/a
Reference: n/a
Review Action: RELEASED, APPROVED
Review Authority: GarlanWA
Review Comment: n/a
Review Content Flags:
Review Date: 22 APR 2002
Review Event:
Review Exemptions: n/a
Review History: RELEASED <22 APR 2002 by kelleyw0>; APPROVED <11 FEB 2003 by GarlanWA>
Review Markings:

Declassified/Released
US Department of State
EO Systematic Review
30 JUN 2005

Review Media Identifier:
Review Referrals: n/a
Review Release Date: n/a
Review Release Event: n/a
Review Transfer Date:
Review Withdrawn Fields: n/a
Secure: OPEN
Status: NATIVE
Subject: FRENCH URANIUM NEGOTIATIONS IN GABON
TAGS: ENRG, EMIN, FR, GB, US
To: STATE NIAMEY
Type: TE
Markings: Declassified/Released US Department of State EO Systematic Review 30 JUN 2005